

# Off The Record



AAO

Archives Association of Ontario

Volume 35, Number 1

Winter 2019

ISSN 2370-1099

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## On the Cover

The good old hockey game in the 1960s—bright colours and no helmets. From the London Free Press Collection of Photographic Negatives at Western Archives and Special Collections, reference code AFC 177-S1-SS15-F220. Titled “Boys Playing Hockey,” and dated January 14, 1967. Submitted by Tom Belton.

## About Us

The Archives Association of Ontario (AAO) was established in 1993 as a result of



the amalgamation of the Ontario Association of Archivists and the Ontario Council of Archives. It is a network of archives and archivists providing programs, education, advocacy and shared knowledge, consisting of approximately 300 members.

The AAO promotes the development of a cooperative system of archives in Ontario by:

- Advocating on behalf of Ontario’s archival community to the government of Ontario, local government and other provincial institutions in order to advance archival practice and promote the value of archives
- Promoting professional standards, procedures and practices among archival repositories
- Facilitating archival communication and cooperation among institutions, users and sponsors
- Providing leadership through communication and co-operation with individuals, groups and associations interested in the preservation and use of Ontario’s documentary heritage

Additionally, the AAO offers a number of different services to its members. Please visit <http://aao-archivists.ca/Services> to learn more.

## Message from the Editor

by Grant Hurley

"Collaboration, or even "radical collaboration" has become a frequently-invoked buzzword in the archives and broader GLAMs communities over the past few years. Indeed, in this issue, AAO Archeion Coordinator Lisa Snider [reports on her attendance and presentation](#) at this year's Ontario Museum Association conference, which was titled "Collaborating for Impact: Not Business As Usual." The AAO had its own take on the subject during the 2017 conference in Toronto, with the theme "Come Together: Meaningful Collaboration in a Connected World." But while collaboration is an ostensible good, it is not without risks, especially when collaborators opt to create a distinct organization, service, product, or project that requires continued funding to ensure its operation.

A recent example is the shutdown of the Digital Preservation Network (DPN) in the United States. DPN was a service-based consortium founded in 2012. It focused on providing a robust preservation storage solution for academic libraries in the US that enabled content to be distributed among a series of nodes located at different universities across the USA. Digital preservationists were shocked to learn in December 2018 that DPN would be closing its doors. [As their announcement stated](#), membership had fallen to the point that the service was no longer sustainable. DPN has been admirably transparent in the reasons behind the initiative's failure. In their analysis, the key one identified is that their service offering did not adequately match the needs of their

users, and therefore membership slowly dwindled as members began to interrogate the costs versus the value. [Roger Schonfeld has written a cogent analysis](#) of the DPN's end at the *Scholarly Kitchen*. The causes he identifies will be sobering (but valuable) reading for anyone involved in the space of trying to develop a collaborative initiative in our field. Among the issues he identifies was that while the initial group of members were happy to sign up for the \$20,000 annual member fee and the ability to join the "club," so to speak, this goodwill didn't last. For many universities, membership at the time possibly stood in for actually doing digital preservation work on the ground. One can easily imagine someone saying "Digital preservation? Oh yes, we're a member of DPN." As time rolled on of course, these costs came under scrutiny as universities started to figure out what they actually needed in terms of digital preservation storage—and from sources that were much cheaper, if not as technically robust. Therefore, as Schonfeld notes, "initial sign-ups may have been more out of courtesy or community citizenship than commitment." Schonfeld also suggests that "DPN will not be the last closure, merger, or other notable reorganization we will see. It seems clear that we are in a period of instability for collaborative library community efforts and more major changes are surely on the horizon." This is a stark reminder for our community that sustainability ought to be a key outcome of collaboration, and that a desire collaboration must also be tied to fulfilling actual needs among community members.

Organizations like the AAO have lived for as long as they have out of more than goodwill: they fill a set of needs and offer resources in an area where resources are scarce.

While things have always a touch-and-go, as we know from our excellent [organizational history book](#), 25 years is nothing to sniff at. The AAO's continued sustainability also means continuing to shift towards new needs as they arise, and to continue to evaluate their operations in light of them, as Juanita Rossiter's President's message on this page makes clear. Thinking of ways to collaborate further as our field develops in new ways is of course a good thing. But resisting the urge to build new things from scratch, as [Allana Mayer put it so well in a Tweet](#) some years ago, and instead prioritizing the maintenance and improvement of the things we've already built, is a necessary corrective. Perhaps that is what "radical" collaboration should look like in the end: an opening of the umbrella to new approaches and methods, new uses of old tools, and to new stakeholders from other domains who can breathe new life into existing initiatives. As Nancy McGovern writes in a [recent piece on radical collaboration in the field of research data management](#), "rather than focusing on individual organizations ... radical collaboration in this context focuses on developing communities that build on organizations" (p. 13). Building on what's here by broadening what constitutes the archives community might indeed be radical enough.

Please enjoy this newest issue of *Off the Record*, with a member spotlight on longstanding AAO member (and current Chapter Stakeholder) John Lund, the aforementioned conference reflection by Lisa Snider, a profile on the Archives of Ontario's new exhibit, *ANIMALIA*, and more!



## Message from the President

by Juanita Rossiter

Dear AAO Members,

"What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness."

- John Steinbeck

A new year is upon us. In the Chinese Zodiac, 2019 is the year of the Pig. According to Chinese astrology, 2019 is a great year to make money and a good year to invest. On that note, I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to our 2018 Giving Tuesday campaign. A total of \$590.00 was donated by AAO members! We will continue with this campaign this November, with a reminder that AAO members are eligible for a tax receipt for all donations.

### 2019 AAO Annual Conference

The 2019 AAO Conference will take place from in Belleville, Ontario from May 8th to 10th. This year's conference theme, "Unlocking the Vaults: Access, Outreach & Engagement", will no doubt result in engaging and informative sessions. Many thanks to Rodney Carter (Program Committee Chair), Amanda Hill (Host Committee Chair), and all their committee members who are working hard to make our annual conference a roaring success. Thanks as well to AAO Board Member Nick Richbell (Director Without Portfolio) who acts as the Board liaison for the Conference Committees.

### Upcoming workshops

The AAO's PDC Committee has put together a roster of engaging workshops for 2019.

This will begin with a [Image Digitization workshop](#) held at the Archives of Ontario on January 24th. Instructor Chris Gonzaga is a Digital Imaging Specialist at the City of Toronto Archives where he presently works on large-scale digitization projects of archival records. With Mary Kosta at the helm, the PDC Committee has recently put a lot of work into an application for funding under the Documentary Heritage Communities Program (DHCP). On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to PDC Chair Mary Kosta and her team (Jacinda Bain, Hilary Barlow, Richard Gale, Darcy Hiltz, Mary Horman, Jean Hung, Stacey Lapp, Samantha Shields, Emily Tyschenko and AAO Board Liaison Lauren Halsey) for all their work which contributes to our continuing education in the field.

### Association Review

Building upon the work initiated by Tracey Krause as President in 2017-2018, the AAO Board has continued to look inward this year – specifically at our finances and ways we can reduce dependency on government grants. This has been an ongoing struggle for the Association, evident in the pages of our [recently published organizational history](#): “The June 14th Executive meeting was told that another \$7,000 core funding grant from the Ministry could be expected after September 1987, but that the Ministry had said the core funding grants could not be expected in perpetuity” (John Smart, page 32). Thirty-two years later, the AAO is still very much dependent on funding from the provincial government. We are of course extremely grateful for our annual grants from the Archives of Ontario and Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (Provincial Heritage Organization Operating Grant). The

onus is on the Association, however, to continue to look for ways to infuse our not-for-profit association with for-profit business practices and annually review our spending to look to ways to reduce our expenditures while simultaneously maintaining our high level of service to our members. One big step undertaken in the past few months has been a review of our contract with our secretariat (Managing Matters), specifically what we pay them to do for us. While these discussions are currently in progress, they will result a few minor changes in the structure of the Board. We are excited to reveal all of this to our members in the coming months so please stay tuned. As Marissa Paron writes in *In Pursuit of the Archival Endeavour*: “If anything, over the years the AAO executives, when deciding the fate of the association or taking action on behalf of its members, have had to contend with either adhering to the traditions of their forebears or trailblazing toward unknown practice. Capacity constraints have not eased decision making for this volunteer-led, not-for-profit organization” (p. 210-211).

I wish you all the best for a happy and healthy 2019.



*Since this message was submitted, Juanita has stepped down from the role of President of the AAO due to health issues. The board as it current stands has been updated on the masthead on page 2. – Ed.*

## Member Spotlight: An Interview with John Lund

### When and why did you first join the AAO?

I joined the AAO in 2011 a year after I started my position as an Archivist with the City of Ottawa Archives. It was a pre-requisite to joining the Executive of the AAO Eastern Chapter. It is important to give back to the profession and in turn learn from other archivists. Previous to my membership in the AAO, I was an active member of the Archives Society of Alberta. I am also a member of the ACA. I find that there is great value in participating in the archives profession in a broad manner. Networking provides for career advancement and it is simply fun to get to know new people. I enjoy giving papers, teaching and providing workshops on a variety of topics, including, photography, copyright, the impact of social media, digital records, and digitization.



John Lund (Submitted photo).

### What is your fondest memory from your involvement with the AAO?

The ACA dance, whoops sorry wrong org. But seriously, my fondest memories would be attributed to the same source, the people and the opportunity the conferences

provide to travel to different locations in Ontario and soak in the various challenges, ideas and opinions fellow archivist can provide. I am originally from British Columbia so each new city that we hold a conference at gives me an opportunity to explore a new geographical area and the social micro-culture that has developed there.

If I am going to be totally open and honest, I also have to say that professional conferences also scare me to death. My confidence is at the fore when I control the stage giving a paper, presenting a workshop or asserting my opinion on an executive, committee or the AAO-listserve (I am so full of opinions) but plunk me down in a crowd of strangers or even people I know and the awkward introvert comes out. So if you are new to the profession don't worry, we have your back. Even someone who has worked in the field for 15 years may be tongue-tied or shy at times, be willing to introduce yourself and jump into conversations.

### Reflecting on your career so far, what accomplishments are you the proudest of?

Broadly, keeping our government bodies accountable to citizens. Specifically, the research and work I have done to represent and document groups marginalized in relation to the dominant culture, including, indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities. For

example, the first audio-digitization project we did at the City of Red Deer Archives was a series of cassettes that were oral histories conducted to document the Lesbian and Gay community(s) in central Alberta. These oral histories were part of a planned exhibit that was maligned by Stockwell Day during his time as an MLA for Red Deer North. Currently, I am on the City of Ottawa's Aboriginal Working Committee Sub Group as a representative for the City of Ottawa Archives. We are working with other City Departments to respond to the TRC's Calls to Action.

**How have you seen the AAO make a difference for archivists practicing in Ontario?**

I believe Archivists gain a great deal through the networking opportunities and learning from fellow colleagues on how they may address similar issues that arise. Where the ACA may provide the big picture theory behind what we practice, the AAO provides ideas rooted in practical experience through workshops and the conference.

**What is the most rewarding part of your work?**

This is a difficult question. In school our eyes are wide open to possibility. We are going to storm out and save our history, make governments accountable, and put to use all this wonderful archival theory. In reality, most of my day is spent doing administration, writing and responding to emails and managing projects. The opportunity to be an archivist at times can feel fleeting. How often do I get to do acquisition/appraisals? How big is my backlog? Yet all of it is important. The work leads to incremental solutions that may have profound

effect on how the City's records are maintained.

For all the newbies out there, learn the art of diplomacy! Archivists cannot work in a silo, they must reach out to their colleagues to ensure records are preserved. This is even more true in a digital age. Here is the reward: I believe we are making headway and our digital records will be preserved.

The other reward in my work is teaching. I greatly enjoy teaching through workshops and other programs the general public, fellow professionals and students.

**What do you see for the future of our profession?**

For there to be a future for the profession archivists will need to be involved at the point of creation of records to ensure their longevity, to ensure the essential protocols are in place for the maintenance and migration of authentic and reliable records. We will need to work and consult with not only information professionals but also professionals from a broad range of disciplines.

We need to turn our ideas of what defines a creator inside out and re-examine those ideas. Products of creation no longer "spring forth" from the head of one creator (not that they ever did), the internet allows, both in our social lives and our work lives, readily easy collaborative interchange.



## Submit to the 2018 Ontario Archival Accessions Survey!

It's that time of year when the Archives Association of Ontario turns its thoughts to accessions and the state of archival collecting in our province.

As such, we want to invite each and every institution in the province that collects archival records to contribute to the 2018 edition of the Ontario Archival Accessions Register (OAR). As in previous years, we are asking repositories to submit basic details on new accessions by completing the [linked reporting form](#). We hope to continue building on the last two years' surveys by encouraging even more institutions to participate, whether they are currently AAO members or not. The aim is to cast the net widely and capture the most comprehensive snapshot of archival collecting possible. We're planning to use the three years' worth of data to begin some analysis work on collecting patterns and trends, so the bigger the response rate the better.

Please use the [linked form](#) to report material legally acquired by your institution in the calendar year 2018. Completed forms should be directed to [chairs@ao-archivists.ca](mailto:chairs@ao-archivists.ca). The deadline to submit responses is **Friday, March 1st, 2019**. The collected data will be made available on the AAO's website during Archives Awareness Week in April.

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## Upcoming AAO Professional Development Workshops:

**Digital Preservation: Key Concepts and Tools** – April 5, 2019 at the Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

Instructor: Grant Hurley

This workshop will introduce participants to the key concepts, standards, practices and tools involved in ensuring that digital materials (both born-digital and digitized) remain accessible into the future. The workshop will begin with an introduction to the key standards and concepts in the field and will be followed by a demonstration and discussion of the variety of tools that are used to perform digital preservation tasks. The workshop is intended for individuals who are unfamiliar with digital preservation work and would like an introduction to its basic components. Please note that the workshop will not focus on digitization, but will provide tools for participants to preserve the outputs of digitization activities.

**Preservation in a Historical Computing Environment** – April 12, 2019 in Toronto.

Instructors: Jess Whyte and Steve Marks

**Indigeneity and Archives** – May 2019 in Belleville.

This is a pre-conference workshop offered as part of the AAO annual conference.

Instructor: Camille Callison

**Emergency Planning and Salvage** – September 2019 in Peterborough.

Instructor: Iona McCraith

As workshop details are finalized, registration will open at [aao-archivists.ca/workshops](http://aao-archivists.ca/workshops). Visit the website any time for our policies, latest events, and other updates.

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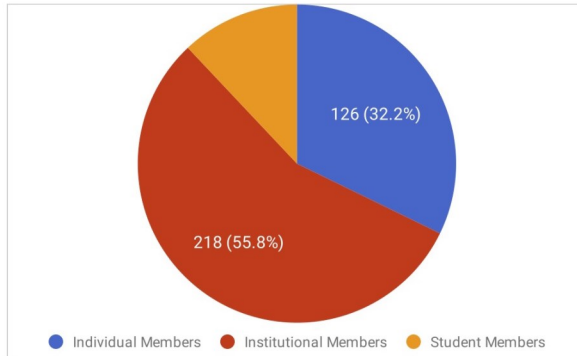


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# AAO Statistics Dashboard September to December 2018

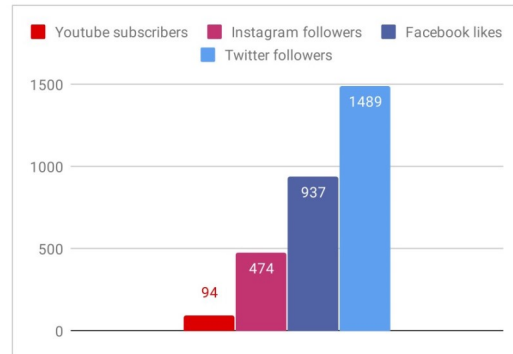
## Membership



	May to Aug 2018	Sept to Dec 2018	Percent change
Total membership	447	391	-12.5

## Communications

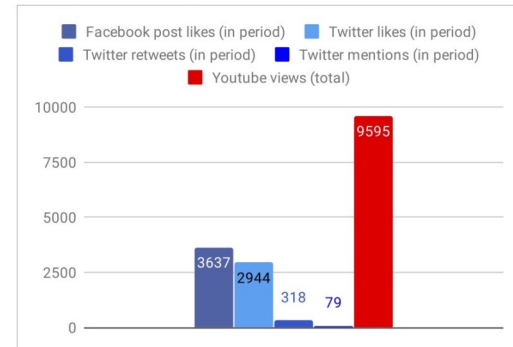
### Social media followers/subscribers



## Archeion

	May to Aug 2018	Sept to Dec 2018	Percent change
Total published descriptions (at all levels)	49,742	59,632	20
Total contributing institutions	183	183	0
New institutions in period	0	0	N/A
Total published authority files	16,225	16,353	1

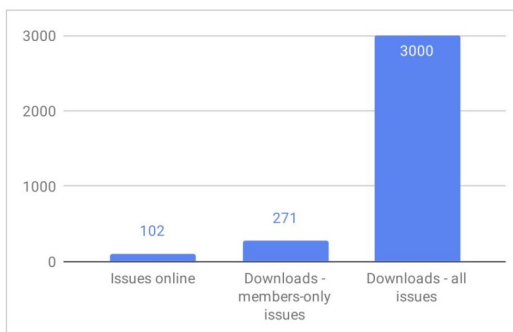
### Likes, retweets, mentions, views



## AAO Consultants

	May to Aug 2018	Sept to Dec 2018	Percent change
Archives Advisor site visits in period	6	2	-66.7
Archives Advisor training sessions in period - members	1	0	-100.0
Archives Advisor training sessions in period - non-members	2	0	-100.0
Archeion Coordinator Descriptions and authorities bulk uploaded in period	7,142	4,416	-38.2

## Off the Record



## Professional Development

	May to Aug 2018	Sept to Dec 2018	Percent change
Workshops in period	3	2	-33.3
Members attended in period	39	11	-71.8
Non-members attended in period	9	5	-44.4
Students attended in period	0	5	N/A

The set of statistics above is a continuing effort to inform members about the status of the AAO's operations and engagement with services. Please note that in issue 34.4, the figure given for Twitter retweets was incorrect. The correct figure was 141 for May-August 2018; it was initially printed as 8509.

## Collaborating for Impact: A Report from the 2018 OMA Conference

by **Lisa Snider**  
*Archeion Coordinator*

I had the great pleasure of being asked to be part of a panel at the 2018 Ontario Museum Association's (OMA) annual conference, "Collaborating for Impact: Not Business As Usual" on October 25, 2018. This

theme fit perfectly with the OMA's priority to build, renew, and develop relationships across sectors in their *Ontario's Museums 2025: Strategic Vision & Action Plan*. The panel was created by Kaven Baker-Voakes. Kaven has a background in journalism, and was a member of the Parliamentary

Press Gallery. He has also volunteered, or worked at several Ontario museums and heritage organizations, and is completing a Museum Studies Certificate through the OMA. I first met Kaven when he was one of the attendees at an in-person Archeion workshop I gave in Ottawa at Ingenium. Adele Torrance, Archivist in Collections and Research at Ingenium, Canada's Museums of

Science and Innovation, kindly invited interested people from other institutions in Ottawa to come to the workshop. Attendees came from a range of library, archives and/or museum environments. At lunch after the session, I chatted with Kaven and we talked about how collaboration was something we both felt was really important in the Gallery, Library, Archives and Museum (known commonly as GLAM) communities. Kaven related later, that this conversation gave him the start of an idea for this panel, and the rest was history! You never know where one conversation will lead!



The "Collapsing Silos, Building Communities: GLAM Sector Collaborations" panel at the Ontario Museum Association's 2018 conference. Left to right: Back—Kaven Baker-Voakes and Lisa Snider; Front—Kerry Badgley and Michael Rikley-Lancaster  
(Submitted photo).

Kaven developed a panel that focused on GLAM collaborations, and invited some amazing fellow panelists from the library and museum communities. The panel included myself, Kerry Badgley, and Michael Rikley-Lancaster. Kerry Badgley is Ontario Library Association's 2018 President.

He served as Editor of the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, and has published in the areas of social and political history, and archival theory. Kerry previously served as an archivist at LAC, and is currently the Research Manager at the Litigation Management and Resolution Branch for Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. Michael Rikley-

Lancaster is an OMA board member. His background includes being the Assistant Curator at the Diefenbunker Museum and a Program Coordinator for Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations with the Canadian Museums Association. He has been a board member with heritage organizations throughout the Ottawa area, and has served as Executive Director/Curator of the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum since 2007. Kaven Baker-Voakes served as our Moderator, but also presented questions with commentary throughout the presentation. I was asked to join as a member of the archival community. I have also worked in library and museum environments. As Archeion Coordinator, I work with members from every part of the GLAM Sector. I really enjoyed this panel collaboration, and learned a lot from Kaven and my fellow panelists.

The talk was titled “Collapsing Silos, Building Communities: GLAM Sector Collaborations.” Kaven put together a list of questions that related to our common challenges with funding, staffing and increased public access, as well as how we might collaborate to develop future partnerships, so we can all benefit. The questions were varied and really made me think about how we can work together, and try to support each other with our challenges and successes. Two examples of the questions we tackled were: How does your

sector, or an organization that your involved, collaborate now? Does it? Why? Why not? What are some of the challenges in your organization and how does it deal with a disconnect between work and the public’s understanding? How might GLAMS collaborate to address?

We were all thrilled that Kaven proposed this session as a panel, but also as a discussion, by inviting audience participation in answering the questions. The audience seemed to really respond to the discussion, and many shared their challenges, current

collaborations, ideas and hopes for collaborations in the future. The discussion was so popular that we didn’t even get through most of our questions! I found these questions really made me think about what I have experienced and what I would like to see happen in the future. For a couple of the questions, I had little in terms of potential

solutions, only more questions! However, I greatly enjoyed hearing what others, both on the panel and in the audience, had to say about this topic. After the panel, I briefly talked with a couple of audience members and they too enjoyed the discussion, and were thinking about potential future collaborations.

After our panel, I went to the GLAM Plenary Panel. The OMA kindly invited me, repre-



“Collapsing Silos, Building Communities: GLAM Sector Collaborations” panel slide at the 2018 OMA conference (Submitted photo).

senting AAO, to attend it and the reception afterwards. John Roberts, Chief Privacy Officer and Archivist of Ontario, was part of a panel made up of leaders in the GLAM sector. It also included Shelley Falconer, President & CEO, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Vickery Bowles, City Librarian, Toronto Public Library, Christina Tessier, President & CEO, Ingenium, Canada's Museums of Science & Innovation, and it was moderated by OMA President Petal Furness. The GLAM Plenary Panel was one of the most interesting panels I have seen in a long time. The discussion focused on public trust in GLAMs and



GLAM Plenary Panel, Ontario Museums Association 2018 conference (Submitted photo).

what our role is in a world of fake news, as well as how we can collaborate and promote public engagement to support democratic values and freedoms. Panelists talked about their experiences, challenges and hopes for the future.

In my view, the two panels started a larger public discussion in the communities. After participating in our panel, and listening to the GLAM Plenary Panel, I was inspired to develop more collaborations, or try and facilitate them for others, in 2019...but more on that in spring!



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## ANIMALIA: Animals in the Archives — How the Archives of Ontario's Newest Exhibit Took Flight

by **Danielle Manning**  
*Outreach Officer,  
Archives of Ontario*

all ages, even those without a keen interest in history, have an affection for animals.” ANIMALIA focuses on five distinct animal groups in the province—fish, bears, horses, dogs and birds—to explore how humans’ relationships with other animals, and the methods we’ve used to document these relationships, have changed over time. The feature animals were chosen based on their strong representation in the AO’s collections, and the diverse connections with humans the records evoke.

Humans aren’t the only ones in archives. Other species have also left their mark on Ontario’s history.

To highlight current programmes and initia-

This is the premise of the Archives of Ontario’s (AO’s) new onsite exhibit, ANIMALIA: Animals in the Archives, which opened to the public on December 6, 2018. Whereas many of the AO’s previous exhibits commemorated specific historical events, animals offer a different way of exploring Ontario’s history and what is documented in archival collections.

“We wanted an exhibit that would be accessible, fun, and surprising,” says ANIMALIA curator, Dr. Jay Young. “I thought that animals would be an excellent concept for an exhibit for a number of reasons. Animal history is a growing trend within academic research, and a subject that allows us to explore timely environmental themes through the lens of archival records. The topic also has the potential to attract new audiences, since most people of



Top: ANIMALIA: Animals in the Archives exhibit at the Archives of Ontario. Bottom: Birds section of the ANIMALIA exhibit, showing passenger pigeon specimens from the Royal Ontario Museum. Photos by Edwin Chiu.



Bears section of the ANIMALIA exhibit.  
Photo by Danielle Manning

mals says as much about us as it does about them,” observes Dr. Young. For example, records and stories in the Bears section illustrate humans’ diverse understanding of bears throughout Ontario’s past, from symbolic beings to dangerous nuisances, and from big game animals to cute, cuddly creatures. Regardless of how we understand bears, these varied perspectives suggest how

tives involving animals, each section also features records, artefacts, and stories from other institutions across Ontario, including the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry’s Fish and Wildlife Branch, Deyohahá:ge: The Indigenous Knowledge Centre at Six Nations Polytechnic, Black Creek Pioneer Village, CNIB, and the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). For example, passenger pigeon study skins from the ROM—keepers of the world’s largest collection of passenger pigeon specimens—reveal how contemporary research using the specimens’ DNA is exploring the feasibility of bringing the species back from extinction, Jurassic Park-style!

The stories in ANIMALIA demonstrate how animals connect us to the land, provide food for many, help us get around, and enrich our lives. “Often, the diverse ways humans have recorded, remembered, and affected other ani-

we see ourselves in the natural world.

Animals are often captured in archival records because of their connections to the humans documenting them. Records like the photograph of an early-twentieth-century Ontario street scene (shown below) prompt many questions about the place of animals in archives, and how they are pre-



G.D. Atkinson Flour & Feed: [street scene, possibly Cornwall, ON], [ca. 1900. Marsden Kemp fonds, C 130-6-0-17-1, Archives of Ontario, I0013581.



Exhibit visitor engaging with the Dog Breed survey in the ANIMALIA exhibit. Photo by Danielle Manning

sent throughout the recordkeeping process. Did the photographer mean to document the dog? Likely not. Was it a stray? Almost impossible to know. Yet, because of the dog's prominence in the scene, "dog" was listed as a descriptive keyword in the record's metadata when the photo was digitized. "Thanks to this detail in the metadata, I was able to find this photo when conducting research for the ANIMALIA exhibit," explains Dr. Young. This example prompts fundamental questions that archivists consider every day: How do we document the past? What records do we keep, and what do they tell us (about the past and about ourselves)? And how can we ensure that records are described in ways that best facilitate their use?

Exhibitions are one of the key ways the AO enables public use of its collections. In ANIMALIA, having audiences engage with archival records is a fundamental reason be-

hind the exhibit's many interactives, which consider audiences' different learning styles. For instance, one lift-the-flap interactive features the results of a survey from 1965 about popular dog breeds, encouraging visitors to compare the results with popular dog breeds in 2017. And, for all the cat lovers feeling excluded from the five feature animals, another area of the exhibit offers visitors a chance to place images of many animals in Ontario within the province's different habitats. "Through these interactives and the diversity of records and stories on display—not to mention the exhibit's numerous selfie spots—the goal is to inspire people to explore how they

document animals in their own lives," says Dr. Young. Creating ways for the exhibit's visitors to engage with the content on a personal level also underscores an important message about archives today: they are inviting, participatory spaces with collections that reveal their true significance when seen and used by the public. Flock to the ANIMALIA exhibit at the AO, or explore the related [online exhibit](#), for a firsthand experience of the value of archives and the (sometimes surprising!) ways that animals are important to Ontario's history.



*ANIMALIA is free to visitors at the Archives of Ontario during their regular [business hours](#), Monday to Saturday. —Ed.*



## Archives in Fiction: Alice Munro, Willa Cather and Archival Narratives of Place on Grand Manan Island

by Grant Hurley

[This article is the fourth of an occasional series on the representations of archivists and archives in fiction by Ontario authors. Please reach out with suggestions on what I should read next, or contribute a piece of your own! - Ed.]

Near the mouth of the Bay of Fundy sits the island of Grand Manan. It takes about an hour and a half to get there by ferry from the mainland. As the ferry rounds North Head, where visitors first dock upon reaching the island, the Swallowtail Lighthouse will blink its reliable light from its perch on the cliffs. That is, you'll see the light if it's a clear day. If it's a foggy one (and Grand Manan has many), the ferry might seem to be traveling in total isolation from the world if not for the blast of the foghorn at the lighthouse's base. Once you get there, you feel isolated no matter the weather, thanks to the long journey and the expansive solitude the place provides. Grand Manan is home to about 2,300 people, most of whom depend on the waxing and waning seasons of the fishing industry and tourism to sustain them. A series of picturesque towns dot the coast of its sheltered eastern side, while its uninhabited western side boast a dramatic series of high cliffs that meet the water crashing on the rocks far below. Grand Manan is part of the traditional territory of the Passamaquoddy people, and like many of the ports and towns on the Canadian side of the border, Loyalists arrived in the late

1790s to flee persecution from the American Revolution and settle the land. Many of their descendants have remained on the island to this day. When visiting Grand Manan one feels a frequent sense of history bumping into the present. Its geology is always in the foreground via the island's cliffs and rock formations. The beaches are dotted with sea glass from old bottles thrown out before the days of recycling (and plastic). Trails once used to save lives from shipwrecks wind around the island. And two dramatic incidents separated by 168 years followed an oddly similar pattern. In 1839, the island's Anglican church was [burned down and an effigy of the rector hung out front](#), presumably over disputes relating to the Church's stumpage fee on prime timber. In 2007, tensions over the presence of a suspected drug dealer on the island [resulted in a shootout and the burning down of the individual's home](#). Even on a small island (or perhaps more on a small island) history repeats itself. Conflagrations aside, I've come to Grand Manan many times over the years to hike and kayak and soak in its exquisite isolation (as well as to consume a vast quantity of lobster and dulse). Two prominent authors, an American Pulitzer Prize-winner for her realist novels set on the Great Plains, and a Nobel Prize laureate best known for mythologizing small town Ontario, have also been attracted to the island. Willa Cather came to Grand Manan on a recommendation from a Ms. Overton, a librarian at the New York Public Library, in 1922. She joined a group of women that became known on the island as the "Cottage Girls." They were single women, mostly, who summered there, enjoyed a good drink, liked talking about art and literature, dressed in pants (scandalously), and smoked (even more scandalously). But Cather came primarily for the "solitude without loneliness" in order to focus on her writing without distraction, as Cather's partner Edith Lewis writes in the memoir *Willa Ca-*

ther Living (p. 129). Cather and Lewis eventually had a cottage built in 1928 and returned every summer until 1940, when World War Two made travel difficult. The cottage is now part of the [Inn at Whale Cove Cottages](#) and can be rented during the summers by the week. Alice Munro visited at some point prior to writing “Dulse,” a story set on Grand Manan that features Willa Cather as a ghostly sort of character. Indeed, the story is a response to meeting a Cather acolyte on the island (Thacker, p. 42-3). Therefore, these fictions and Grand Manan present an interesting set of layers: an island, an American novelist, and a short story inspired by both.



The Cather Cottage on Grand Manan.

One of the fascinations that brought me to archives is the relationship between archival records, and the institutions that hold them, and a particular place. How do archival materials and their repositories contribute to a dialogue with the places where they are situated? In *These Ghostly Archives: The Unearthing of Sylvia Plath*, a book relaying the experience of studying Sylvia Plath’s life and works via her archives, authors Gail Crowther and Peter K. Steinberg attempt to define something they call the “living archive.” The “living archive,” they write, stands in contrast to the presumably dead archive of records we know so well. It comprises “those places in the physical environment that Plath visited and lived in that became important contributors to her life and work” (p. 15). While Crowther

and Steinberg acknowledge that an understanding of one is dependent on an understanding of the other, they nevertheless set up a binary between the “inside” and “outside” of archives that is predicated on attempting to illustrate how a garden or a faded sign might be itself an archive. This sense of boundary, of course, is a false one: archives are porous, not physically (one hopes!) but in how archival records speak to places and vice versa. A place is nothing if not a story about what has happened there over time, and archivists hope that evidence creating and supporting that story has been recorded somewhere, whether in an archival repository or passed down by the words of the storytellers themselves. But

Crowther and Steinberg do hit upon an interesting aspect of the relationship between archives and place when it comes to literature. A work of fiction adds another story to a place; one that requires an additional set of sources to interpret and unravel. These sources are the fiction itself and the records of the author, but also the archival records about the place where the author wrote or set their writing. The Grand Manan-Cather-Munro connection is one such fascinating constellation of stories that surround a singular place.

The first star in the constellation is Alice Munro’s short story “Dulse.” “Dulse” was first published in *The New Yorker* on July 21, 1980 and then again with some revi-

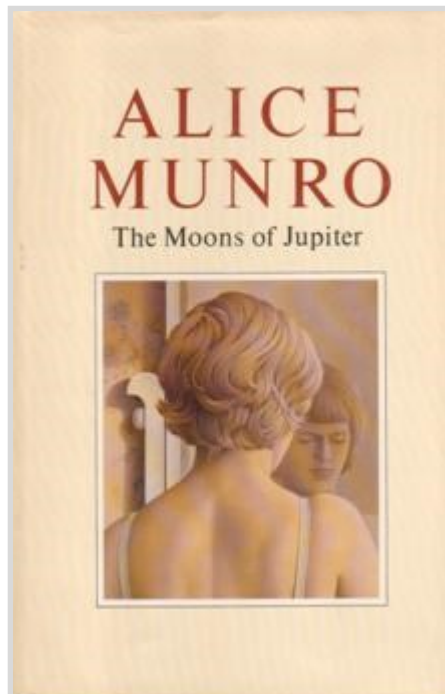
sions in the collection *The Moons of Jupiter* in 1982. The story follows Lydia, who has taken a short trip to Grand Manan after the fallout of a relationship with a man from Kingston named Duncan. At her lodging house she surveys the other individuals there: Mr. Stanley, a scholarly devotee of Willa Cather; the hotel owners; and three workmen who are employed laying telephone lines: Lawrence, Vincent, and Eugene. Lydia evaluates each of their characters and approaches to life in relation to herself, searching for a model that will enable her to move forward with greater self-assurance and independence. With Duncan, she found herself constantly attempting to define herself against his needs, and now is searching for some sense of self that can be stronger apart from him. Lydia entertains the idea of taking one of the workmen as a lover, but demurs, and instead focuses on Cather herself, via Mr. Stanley's confident vision of who Cather was. His responses to Lydia's questions about Cather are always situated with great certainty: "Willa Cather would have..." (p. 58). Lydia concludes that Stanley has a "durable shelter he had made for himself" via his unwavering belief in the correctness of his understanding of Cather as both a person and an artist (p. 59). The narrator notes, "The day may come when Lydia will count herself lucky to do the same" (p. 59). As Robert Thacker argues, Mr. Stanley, and by extension, the presence of Cather, provides Lydia with a vision of an "unwavering persona

[Cather] presented to the world throughout her life," as a possible model (p. 48).

Mr. Stanley represents a line of scholars and other devotees who made pilgrimages to Grand Manan to seek evidence of Cather's presence there. Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, when Cather's critical reputation began to be renewed, scholars arrived on the island keen to interview resi-

dents who remembered meeting her. Such sources include an oral history by Robert Spiller titled *The Cottage Girls and Whale Cove Cottages* which is in very few libraries, and a piece in the [Cather Society newsletter detailing a trip to the island in 1995](#). A book-length work by Marion Marsh Brown and Ruth Crone titled *Only One Point of the Compass: Willa Cather in the Northeast* was published in 1980. While this work seems to have relied on oral histories collected on the island, it tragically lacks citations, an introduction, or other contextualization detailing where the information came from. Brown and

Crone focus especially on Cather's unfriendly public persona on the island (and elsewhere); she rebuffed most social advances from others staying at the nearby cottages and did not connect substantively with individuals on the island, with the exception of the island doctor, Dr. J.F. Macaulay, whom Edith Lewis praises as a "staunch friend" in her memoir (p. 194). Lewis herself apologizes for Cather's apparent lack of interest in others as a result of "self-preservation" (p. 137). As Cather's renown grew, Lewis explains that she found the demands on her



Alice Munro's *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982). Source: [Wikipedia](#), fair use for criticism/review.

time by strangers stifling of her creativity. “The luxury she prized above all others was freedom” Lewis says, “and she now found her freedom hampered with every turn” (p. 136). Grand Manan offered such freedom



The Swallowtail Lighthouse on a fine day on Grand Manan.

– but here too she was extremely protective of her privacy and time. Island historian L.K. Ingersoll, one of the first to write about Cather’s life on Grand Manan, notes, “The handful of Island residents who can claim her acquaintance are, at best, reserved in their opinion. Few of them knew her well. ... she liked Grand Manan because of its seclusion and would have been happier still if she and her companions had been the only inhabitants” (p. 2). Munro considers these isolationist aspects of Cather’s personality in “Dulse.” Like Edith Lewis, Mr. Stanley also apologizes for Cather’s unsociability: “All people of great abilities are apt to be a bit impatient in daily matters” (p. 57). Lydia thinks “Rubbish ... she sounds like a proper bitch” (p. 57). But what Lydia seems to land on at the end is something akin to the desire that Cather herself had, and presented to the world: of setting priorities and boundaries in order to pursue her life as she desires.

Robert Thacker points out the relationship between “Dulse” and Cather’s only fiction set on the island, the short story “Before Breakfast.” The story features Henry Grenfell, a character suffering from existential ennui, especially the feeling that others are

setting expectations for his life that he cannot meet. But during a walk on the island he sees a young woman plunge confidently and unselfconsciously into the cold surf to go for a swim. When she emerges unharmed, he

has an epiphany that he must reconcile himself to time and find solace in his own self-assurance and sense of values (Thacker, p. 44), a set of ideas not unlike what Lydia moves towards in “Dulse.” What unites all of them, then, is the island itself. As Klaus Stitch, another literary scholar writing on “Dulse” concludes, Grand Manan is “like a symbolic rock in fields of sea ... a sanctuary for Cather and ... a practical place for Munro to do the same” (p. 110). We have arrived back at Grand Manan as a land and place, and this is where, above what publications and materials are related to Cather directly, its archives can assist. Here is where a stronger understanding of place can reflect back on the writing about that place, and allow the two to refract one another. Some scholars writing about Cather and the island have failed to do so productively. In an essay on Cather’s association with Grand Manan, scholar Constance Perry makes the unfortunate claim that “Grand Manan has no literary history apart from its association with Willa Cather” (p. 181). This is patently false, as a visit to the Grand Manan Museum and Archives, as well as other historical sites on the island, would show. One such source is the poetry of Walter McLaughlin, a lighthousekeeper

on nearby Gannet Rock during the 1800s. A poem of his is included exhibit inside the Swallowtail Lighthouse. Originally published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in [March 1878](#), the poem was taken from a diary of McLaughlin's that he kept while serving in his role. What other works might McLaughlin have left, and how might these contribute to the literary history of the island? Similarly, the many issues of the island's history journal, the *Grand Manan Historian*, contain all sorts of leads towards the stories and literatures of the island. These sources may speak convincingly in ways that support and reflect Cather and Munro's uses of the island as a structure for their characters (and creative lives). While Cather and Munro's characters seek independence, it may be that that independence actually requires the firm base of the island to sustain them. This is an ecological, geographical, and historical relationship rather than a specifically individual one. As George Greene writes in an essay about Cather's relationship to the place, "Grand Manan's mutual nurture between human beings and habitat enjoins us to think harder about the reality of interdependence" (p. 238).

If Grand Manan is a living archive, it is so constituted by the land itself in relation to the stories of the people who have lived on that land. Fiction can make a place both more real, but also more foreign. An author can depict a place in the mind's eye, an action that focuses the attention on its details – a set of trees, a view to the ocean beyond – that make that place seem all the more living. But this act of writing also distances this place from the reader because the author's set of interpretations necessarily layer their own values and interests on top of that place, including changing details of the place or perspective as needed for the fiction. It is archival records that bind the two: they bring the place closer to the fiction, and the fiction closer to the place by docu-

menting the stories of both and how they relate to one another. But the fiction and the place never quite meet, and this gap is the most thrilling part.

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